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THE GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNAL

VOLUME CI

JANUARY TO JUNE

1943

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE COUNCIL
EDITED BY THE SECRETARY

THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY
KENSINGTON GORE LONDON S.W.7
EDWARD STANFORD LTD. 12 LONG ACRE W.C.2

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The
GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNAL

Vol CI No 1 R.G.S. *January 1943*

ETHIOPIAN HIGHLANDS

W. E. D. ALLEN

Meeting of the Society, 18 January 1943

114 THIS lecture does not pretend to be a serious study of any geographical aspect of Ethiopia. It is rather a record of impressions gained during a year spent in Ethiopia in various jobs ranging from the care of a park of derelict mules to that of Intelligence Officer to the newly formed Ethiopian Army.

Unluckily I was posted away from Addis Ababa at short notice, and my reference books in Italian and Italian photographs of ethnological interest which I had collected should now be in Nairobi, if they have not been lost. Many of the photographs used as illustrations were taken in the field by Captain Mark Pilkington, the Life Guards, a very gallant officer who distinguished himself in the guerrilla fighting round Lake Tana and who was killed in action in Libya, just two months ago.

With the possible exception of parts of the Shankalla wilderness, which is the Abyssinian extension of the Sudan plain between the western bend of the Blue Nile and the Escarpment, it cannot be said that any large areas of the Ethiopian Empire had remained unvisited by Europeans prior to the Italian War of 1935–36 and the campaign of 1941. I have however come across no account of the remarkable massifs of Dungwur and Belaia which rise out of 133 the Shankalla plain to the east of the Escarpment. On the tableland of Belaia, well within the nominal Italian frontier, an advance base for the supply of the Patriot forces was established in January 1941 and in February the Emperor set up his headquarters there.

[137] These twin mountain masses rise out of the Shankalla plain to an altitude of about 7000 feet above sea-level. They are covered with rich forests and watered by fast-running streams. Dungwur was uninhabited and visited [361] only from time to time by stray bands of Abyssinian hunters. But there are flourishing villages and ancient churches on Belaia. It was a weird experience to reach these strange islands of luxuriating nature after the long camel trek across the burnt-out Shankalla wilderness. From a day's march away we

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133 could see the forests blazing on the flanks of Belaia from the bombs dropped by the Savoias in their unsuccessful attempts to search out the Emperor's camp.

The wooded flanks of the Western Escarpment of the Ethiopian plateau overlook the plains of the Sudan. The top of the Escarpment is 4000–5000 feet above sea-level, and the gap opposite Mambuk village which we climbed is about 2000 feet above the level of the Shankalla plain, which rises steadily in a series of low rocky corrugations all the way from the Dinder river some 100 miles to the west. From the top of the Escarpment the fertile plains of Gojjam stretch for another 100 miles to the canyon of the Blue Nile. There is a fall of about 5000 feet to the great ravine with its subtropical vegetation from the dusty upland round Debra Markos. From the western edge of the Blue Nile Scarp it is a whole day's march down to the river for loaded animals, and more than a day's march up the eastern bank on to the Salale plateau at Shafartak.

The Ethiopian Highland is a series of plateaux separated by deep canyons such as that of the Blue Nile. The eastern edge of the Highland is the western edge of the great African rift. There is a parallel rift from lake Tana along the canyon of the Blue Nile to the Southern Lakes of Ethiopia and it is continued through the East African lake system down to lake Tanganyika. A series of north–south and east–west faults divide up the Ethiopian highland into separated plateaux. The Awash valley, running west–east, and really connecting the north–south rifting with the Red Sea basin, flows in the most notable of these. The different plateaux are sometimes connected by narrow necks of land or panhandles: for instance the neck connecting the plateau of Debra Zebit with that of Debra Tabor is hardly more than 100 yards across with a sheer drop south-west to the ravine of the Bashilo and north to that of the Gash or Takkaze.

133 These peculiar geographical conditions explain much in Ethiopian history.
177 The great line of the Escarpment, overlooking the Red Sea depression on the
648 east and the Sudan plains to the west, has protected the population of the uplands from penetration by foreign armies until modern times. The only successful conquest of Ethiopia was that of Muhammad Gran, the "left-handed," a Somali chieftain who is reputed to have had an Ethiopian father. The Somali-Arab armies which were really the spearhead of Turkish imperialism on the Red Sea in the great days of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, penetrated the Ethiopian Highland by the Awash valley in a series of campaigns which lasted for about half a century. In the end the great altitudes and the inclement rainy seasons probably restored their independence to the Ethiopians. In general, it may be said that the Highlanders have never been able to conquer and hold the hot lowlands of the Red Sea and the Arabs and Somalis have never been able to maintain themselves on the upland plateau. Only in the subtropical region of the southern lakes as far as the Dadessa valley and Jimma has there been any important penetration of Islamic influences.

133 Foreign influences, Semitic and that peculiar early Ethiopian or Eritrean
177 civilization known as Aksumite, have come in from the north over the easier

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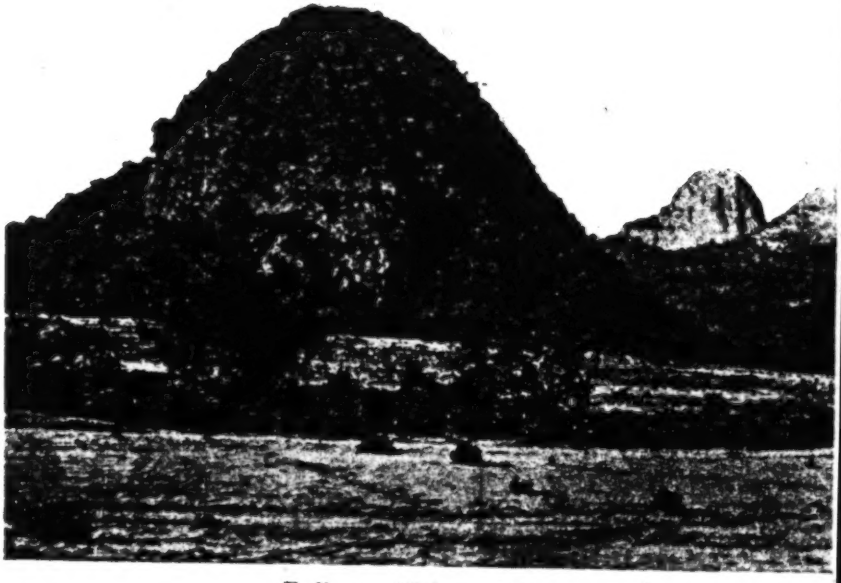

Fudi, near Njabara, Gojjam

Phot. L. V. Bentinck

Debra Libanos, 1928

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grade from the Eritrean plateau. All civilization in Ethiopia has penetrated from north to south along the great dorsal ridge of the Eastern Escarpment, where the so-called Strada Imperiale now runs from Asmara to Addis Ababa.

Along this line have been concentrated the successive Ethiopian capitals with the exception of Gondar, which was chosen far to the north-west as a refuge from the ruinous wars with the Moslems and the Gallas. And along this line, due south from Aksum and Aduwa, were the great centres of the Copto-Ethiopian culture of the Middle Ages, places like Lalibala and the monasteries on lake Haik and the traditional centre of the Coptic Church at Debra Libanos.

From this dorsal ridge of the Eastern Escarpment Ethiopian culture, and it was a very real culture in its heyday, spread westward into Gojjam and southward to the region of the lakes. Luca di Sabelli in his recent 'Storia di Abissinia' has shown that Coptic-Ethiopian missionaries were active as far south as Madagascar and the Mozambique coast.

Ethiopian Coptic culture drew its nurture from the powerful Coptic Church in Cairo, from the Crusading civilization in Palestine, and from the Byzantine Empire. Just as the establishment of the Turks at the exit from the Black Sea brought about the decline of the East Christian cultures in the Caucasus and the Balkans, so the Turkish control of the Nile valley and the Red Sea slowly strangled the Coptic Ethiopian culture of East Africa. The Ethiopian rulers, pressed by the invasions of Muhammad Gran, were well aware of their mortal danger and it is a curious fact that kings in Georgia and Ethiopia appealed to the rising power of Spain in the Western Mediterranean at about the same time. The Portuguese episode in Ethiopia was a delayed response to the appeal made to the Catholic powers.

The extraordinary tenacity of the Ethiopians to the western tradition is a remarkable characteristic of their historical development. The Aksumite kingdom, for all its Semitic appearance, was essentially a projection of Hellenism, and the Aksumite kings remained the traditional allies of the Byzantine Emperors in their struggle with the Persian Sasanids for the control of the Red Sea—an episode which was parallel in time with the conflict between these same two "world powers" for mastery of the Black Sea. The Coptic Church and Christian civilization in East Africa proved more enduring than the once powerful Nestorian Church in Asia, with which it may in some ways be compared. The later Ethiopian Kingdom played the same role in the struggle between Turks and Portuguese for control of the Red Sea and for the trade of the Indian Ocean as the Aksumites had a thousand years earlier in the rivalry between Byzantines and Persians. But they showed the same persistent antagonism to the Roman Church as the East Christians had displayed towards the Crusaders and the Papacy. In the end the Ethiopians expelled the Portuguese from Abyssinia and managed to maintain their own independence against their Moslem neighbours, until in the last decade it was suppressed by a professedly Christian power.

The Ethiopians are a remarkable phenomenon in the East African world and with their tenacity and their undoubted natural intelligence they are destined to have no little influence on the future course of history in that area.

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Gojjam

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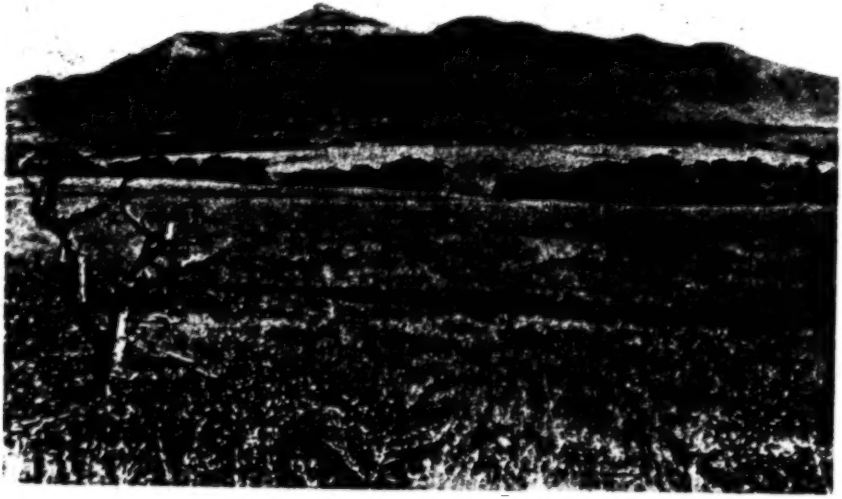

Camp at Matakal, Gojjam, complete air cover for standing camp along wooded wady

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186 The great weakness of the Ethiopians, their inveterate regionalism, arises, like other aspects of their life and history, from the peculiar conditions of their geography. The four historic Kingdoms of Tigrai and Amhara, Shoa and Gojjam, cover the plateaux divided by the canyons of the Blue Nile and [132] the Takkaze and their lateral rifts. During four months of the year, the season of the Great Rains between July and October, Gojjam is entirely cut off from Shoa and Amhara by the floods of the Blue Nile. Only recently has the construction of the bridge over the Blue Nile at Shafartak, a major engineering undertaking, made continuous contact possible. The violent regionalism of the Gojjam has been a disastrous factor in internal Ethiopian history which will doubtless tend to decline with the modern development of communications.

114 The Gojjam, scene of the guerrilla campaign of 1941, has been de-
195 scribed by Major Cheesman, formerly H.B.M. Consul in Dangila, in several articles in the Society's *Journal*, and in his standard work on the province, 'Lake Tana and the Blue Nile.' Cheesman's work was in fact the basis of knowledge which made practical the organization of the expedition to reinforce the Patriot groups which were in the field against the Italians at the moment when Italy declared war on Britain. His exploration of the gap up the Escarpment, the fruit of an arduous excursion described in his book, enabled the Frontier Battalion of the Sudan Defence Force with their camel convoys of supplies and arms to make a rapid deployment on to the Escarpment.

175 The least-known part of the Gojjam province is probably the region of the Choké Mountains which rise to the north of Debra Markos. In an effort to [491] hold down this very wild bit of country the Italians had built forts at Mota and other points and a passable dirt road had been constructed linking Debra Markos *via* Mota with Bahrdar—the Italian strong point at the southern tip of Lake Tana. After the capture of Debra Markos in April 1941, it proved necessary to make contact with the small group of Patriots and one company of Sudanese with some British officers and non-commissioned officers who were containing the very considerable Italian force still in the field round the south-east shore of Lake Tana. At Debra Markos we were very short of troops. Further, scarcity of mules made it necessary to try the experiment of taking camels over the pass which runs under the peaks of Choké at an altitude indicated on Italian maps at rather over 13,000 feet. Kit had to be limited to one ground-sheet and one blanket each for all ranks and the plain-bred Sudanese, many of whom were already lame with jiggers, suffered from cold and mountain-sickness particularly in the hail blizzard which struck the force on the bare ridge of the Choké Pass. Nevertheless this one company of Sudanese covered the 70 odd miles in just under three days, and Colonel Boustead bluffed the Italian battalion in Mota into surrender within forty-eight hours of opening fire with his solitary mortar.

I was following along in the rear with the camel *hamlia* and on reaching base camp in front of Mota was met with orders to about turn and take the animals back to Debra Markos. I thus crossed the Choké Mountains twice [114] in one week. With amateur medical and veterinary duties and a driving mist at the higher altitudes alternating with rain, sleet, and hail, I had little opportunity for geographical observation.

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The Emperor and Colonel Wingate at Debra Markos, April 1941

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Household Cavalry

Patriots entering Debra Tabor, July 1941

[Facing p. 5]

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tunity for geographical observation. The vegetation was really fantastic.[1] Along the higher slopes of Choké giant red-hot pokers stretched for miles. Rather lower the ground was carpeted with violets and beautiful mosses. There were bushes of heather growing higher than the height of a man, and a variety of lichens. In the silence of the mountains in the early morning mists, the atmosphere strangely recalled parts of Ireland or the North Cornish coast. It was a fitting background for the magical beliefs and the immaterial psyche of the Ethiopians, which the more matter-of-fact European finds difficult to comprehend.

It was interesting to note that at about 11,000 feet there appeared to be a sort of fly-line. The flies, which are a constant pest round Debra Markos at 9000 feet, entirely disappeared and only appeared again on the incline down to Mota and the Blue Nile.

There were only two or three villages along the track[2] which of course is a new one, but collections of huts were fairly frequent over the lower slopes, particularly on the incline to the Blue Nile. Cultivation was maintained up to about 12,000 feet. I gather from a book on the Heights of Simen (to the north-east of the Gondar area) that there is a flourishing farming life at the same altitudes in that region. Grazing was magnificent and live stock were notably well conditioned by comparison with the animals of the Debra Markos district.

Colonel Boustead's force continued from Mota to Bahrdar at the southern tip of Lake Tana, where they made contact with the small mixed group of Abyssinians, Sudanese, and British under Major Simmonds. The march was continued in the direction of Debra Tabor, the former capital of Ras Gugsa Wolye, which the Italians had made into a major defended locality—the base for a line of dependent forts strung out along the road which linked Dessie on the Strada Imperiale with Gondar. Conditions remained difficult at an altitude of over 9000 feet in the first weeks of the so-called Little Rains which break in May.

Meanwhile a force of one company of Sudanese and one company of a newly formed Ethiopian battalion with a few British officers and N.C.Os. under Colonel Wingate, O/C Gojjam Force, was following the retreating garrison of Debra Markos. About eight thousand of these had survived the operations in Gojjam and they had retired across the Blue Nile, blowing up the Shafartak bridge, and were making for Magdala and Debra Tabor across the mountains which lie to the east of the Blue Nile and to the north of the main road from Debra Markos to Addis Ababa. Harassing operations were kept up throughout the month of May and, when two thousand of Ras Kassa's Shoans joined in, Colonel Wingate was strong enough to bring the enemy to a general action. The affair was decided when Bimbashi Thesiger, by a remarkable 50-mile march in twenty-four hours over hostile country, seized a panhandle connecting two plateaux along which the Italians were intending to retreat. As a result the remnants of the fifty-one enemy battalions stationed in the Gojjam surrendered at Agibar, about four months after the Emperor had set up his original headquarters at Belaia.

All this country on the marches of the ancient kingdoms of Shoa and Amhara was relatively little known before the Italian occupation. I refer to

[1] [i.e., in the Choké Mountains. -Analyst]

[2] [i.e., between Debra Markos and Mota. -Au.]

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Camels flattening landing ground at Matakal

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Captain Pilkington's Wallos on parade, October 1941

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Men of Gaint [Facing p. 6]

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the triangle of mountains bounded on the north by the Dessie–Debra Tabor road; on the west by the canyon of the Blue Nile; on the east by the Strada Imperiale; and on the south by the Debra Markos–Addis Ababa road. Here Ras Kassa's Shoan fief of Salale adjoins his territories in Amhara Saint. Salale is a great grassy upland, in May already swept by rain storms for six or eight hours a day. The road to Addis Ababa passes through Ras Kassa's capital of Fiche, which has the usual character of Abyssinian country towns: an agglomeration of huts standing in rather dreary eucalyptus groves and dominated by a fort and the European villa of the Ras. Salale has the reputation of being the best horse-raising country in Abyssinia.

Fiche has a certain strategic importance in the feudal politics of Abyssinia since it lies across the main line of communication between the capital and Gojjam; and in the period of *coup d'états* in the '20s the lord of Salale was always in the position to intervene suddenly in the capital only 70 miles away.

Ras Kassa has always maintained his loyalty to the Makonnen house. He is a magnificent old veteran of war and politics, rugged and erect in spite of his advanced years. Ras Kassa's two elder sons, who had come in to discuss a truce with the Italians some months after the fall of Addis Ababa in 1936, were executed under circumstances of abominable treachery. Nevertheless the old Ras made himself responsible for the escort of the Agibar prisoners over about 150 miles of country without a single one of them coming to any harm.

I was fortunate in June and July in spending some time in Dessie and in making my way up to the Debra Tabor district where, in mid-July, the Italian garrison of some six thousand men surrendered. Dessie, which means "my joy" in Amharic, is an ideal base from which to study the incomparably beautiful country round. The former capital of Ras Michael, the Moslem father of the ex-Emperor Lij Iyasu, Dessie became the northern military headquarters of the Empire during the years preceding the Italian conquest. Dessie was favourably situated in relation to the Italian frontier in southern Eritrea, but it owed its strategic importance to the inner political situation. To the east and north-east along the line of the Eastern Escarpment overlooking the Danakil Depression and the Red Sea basin is the country of the turbulent Wagara Gallas who were, and who remain, a recurrent threat to internal security. The Wagara clans in fact lie athwart the main south–north route from Addis Ababa to Aduwa and the new and hardly less important motor road down the Escarpment and across the Danakil desert to Assab. During the years 1929–31, each autumn after the Great Rains, the Emperor had not less than thirty thousand men in the field engaged in more or less fruitless marches and counter-marches over the highlands of the Wagara country.

Scarcely less formidable were the great conservative lords of the north: Ras Gugsa of Makale, who afterwards went over to the Italians; Ras Seyum of Tigrai, ruling all the country between the upper Takkaze and the Eritrean border; and Ras Gugsa Wolye of Debra Tabor, an ex-husband of the Empress Zawditu, who himself had pretensions to the throne and the support of the powerful centre of the Coptic priesthood in Aduwa.

The last great feudal campaign in Ethiopia took place in 1931. The Im-

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Gojjam notable and boy learning trade of war by carrying weapons

Gojjamis, Matakal

Mule and Hotchkiss gun crossing Blue Nile

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perial Army, recruited largely from the non-Amharic southern region of Galla-Sidamo, advanced from Dessie and met the feudal levies of the pretender on the plateau of Debra Zebit. A great head-on encounter of over thirty thousand riflemen and spearmen took place along a front extending over 10 km. A lucky reconnaissance by the Emperor's two French Potez planes was probably the decisive episode in the battle. Somewhere in the mêlée Ras Gugsa Wolye was dragged from his mule and hacked to pieces. This last epic contest of feudal lords recalls one of the battles of the Wars of the Roses.

Dessie itself has something of the character of an alpine *Kurort*, and the Italians intended to develop it as such. When I was there the fairly numerous Italian colony was being removed to Asmara, and it was obvious that the town was gradually reverting to the untidy agglomeration of huts and shanties which is all the easy-going Ethiopian countryman requires in a town.

The surrounding grassy *alms* are the finest stock-raising country in Africa. Between the surrounding peaks of the uplands I have ridden for 3 or 4 miles over turf as flat as a race-course. I had the pleasant task of running a reception camp for surrendered Italian mules and ponies, and I was free to spend a good deal of time in the saddle under fresh wind-swept skies which recalled an English June.

The road from Dessie to Debra Tabor descends and ascends the canyon of the Bashilo and crosses the plateau of Debra Zebit. Magdala, the fortress capital of the Emperor Theodore, lies to the south-west, and the route from the Bashilo to Debra Zebit is the reverse of that taken by Napier in 1868, when he made his remarkable march up from the Red Sea. After Debra Zebit the route crosses the panhandle which forms the watershed between the Bashilo flowing to the Blue Nile and the northward-flowing Takkaze. Farther on towards Debra Tabor, with the incline down to the Lake Tana basin, the vegetation becomes richer. Snipe abound and are so tame that they could almost be killed with a stick.

In the mountains to the south-east of Debra Tabor is the curious anarchic community known as the Republic of Gaint, whose people claim to recognize no authority. The late Captain Pilkington and Captain McLean, who were organizing the tribes south and east of Lake Tana, managed to establish very friendly contact with the Gaint people.

Many hard things have been said about the Abyssinians. Some people have found it difficult to get on with them; but it is notable that foreigners who have spent some time with them are generally happy in their company. Under the name of Abyssinian, or of Ethiopian which they themselves prefer, are included people as varied as the Amhara and the Galla; the Hararene and the Tigraian; the Shoan and the Agau. It is worth giving an individual impression of these different groups.

The Amhara racial type includes both the Amhara and the Shoan, and, to a great extent also, the Gojjami. The Amhara are the dominant racial stock of the central Ethiopian Highland rather than the ruling caste of Ethiopia. There are plenty of poor Amhara villagers. The Amhara are described as of Hamitic origin; but from the earliest times there has been a strong infusion

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of Semitic blood. There is rather more of the Semite in the Tigraian and the Amhara than in the Shoan and the Gojjami. The Tigraian language has come much under Semitic influences, and there are many common elements in Amharic and Arabic: not only in vocabulary but also in syntax. The Amharic alphabet, with over two hundred and fifty odd letters, is a very exact instrument for rendering the language. It is derived from one of the old Semitic alphabets of the Middle East. Amharic has many explosive sounds which often give the impression that the speaker is excited and indignant when he is not, and with the impatient foreigner this can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

Physically the Amhara is slight and light-boned with regular rather delicate features. He has quick almost bird-like movements and his manner gives the impression which I cannot describe better than by the word fluttering. The hair and beard has the characteristic Hamitic corrugation. Men often go iron grey in middle life, but seldom white. The hair of the women is artificially frizzed and dressed with butter-grease to fix it. This gives them a gollywog appearance.

The Amhara have the most charming manners and they like to stand on ceremony. They have a complicated social hierarchy and always dismount as a salutation to superior persons. They will also touch with their lips the hands or knees of superiors. At the same time they have the naturally easy and democratic outlook of the East; and the poorest man will expect attention and the right of access to a Ras, or even to the Emperor. The approaches to the palace at Addis Ababa were lined with sometimes quite humble people, farmers and soldiers, waiting an opportunity to secure the Emperor's decision on some matter.

To respond to his ceremonial manners is an easy way to the heart of the Ethiopian. At the same time they are quick to take offence and their shrill voices are soon raised in anger.

The frail physique and mercurial temperament of the Amhara is doubtless the result of the rarefied alpine atmosphere and of a diet predominantly of grain paste seasoned with strong condiments—which they vary from time to time with orgies on practically raw meat. But fragile as they look, the Amhara are, nevertheless, extremely hardy. They will sleep out in all weathers with nothing to cover them but their thin cotton robes; they are remarkable runners and can maintain a jog trot all day; they are like goats on the hillside.

I believe the Amhara to be naturally intelligent with a brain which only awaits proper training and development. During the five years of the Italian occupation, no small proportion of the population of Addis Ababa acquired a fair knowledge of Italian. I knew a boy of twenty who, in addition to excellent English, was proficient in Arabic, Somali, Galla, and Swahili. He came, of course, from Harar, which is a great metropolis for peoples from all round the Red Sea. Abyssinian recruits acquired a knowledge of Morse with remarkable facility.

When it is possible to overcome the linguistic difficulty and get on friendly terms with Ethiopians, they prove delightful companions, naturally kind, generous and friendly, with a charming sense of humour and often a nice

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Falasha MP9

A [57]

irony. They are a happy people with a deep love of the natural world around them.

A 563

The Tigraians of the north are different. There is something hard and seasoned about a Tigraian which makes him easily distinguishable from an Amhara. The Tigraian is rather the yeoman type. The sharper drier climate of the borders of Eritrea gives him something which recalls a little the ruggedness and shrewdness of the Castilian. There is a determined look in the Tigraian eye which contrasts with the wild and passionate glance of the Amhara. The Amhara and the Tigraians, with the kin Hadendoa of Eritrea, represent varying degrees of mixing of the Hamitic and Semitic stocks.

A 563 F 105

The Agau, on the other hand, are said to be the descendants of the pure Hamitic stock—believed to be aboriginal to the Ethiopian Highland. They may well be "the blameless Ethiopians" of the ancients. The judaised mountaineers of the Simen mountains speak an Agau dialect. There are islands of Agau in Gojjam, particularly along the line of the Western Escarpment. To the best of my knowledge these people together with the neighbouring negroid Gumuz of the Shankalla wilderness, another very primitive stock, have never been seriously studied. The language and customs of the Agau must be of considerable interest from the aspect of comparative linguistics and folklore.

The Agau villages through which we passed between the Escarpment and Njabara were miserably poor in the midst of an often fertile countryside: goitre, elephantiasis, and leprosy were rife. The people have long been a serf population under Amhara overlords; but in the tenth century they threw up the brilliant Zagwe dynasty which ruled Ethiopia for more than three centuries. The Zagwe episode in Ethiopian history seems to have represented some reaction of the older people of the Highland against the Amhara elements intruding from the north.

It may be of interest to refer here, in connection with the Agau, to the so-called Falashas or Black Jews. The main centre of the Falashas, who are Agau-speaking, has been in the Simen Mountains, but during the last century they have become scattered about all the north of the Ethiopian Highland. The religious practises of the Falashas are stated by people who have studied them to be those of the Jewish faith before the Babylonian captivity. The Falashas may therefore represent a remnant of a very old Jewish dispersion, or at least an early penetration of Jewish influences into the Ethiopian Highland.

A 173

Again it has been pointed out by Luca di Sabelli, Conte Rossini, and others that the ritual of the Coptic Church in Ethiopia retains a number of practises which were a part of the Jewish religion before the Captivity.[1] These cultural remnants from the past have a bearing on the tenacious tradition in Ethiopia that the Royal House is descended from Menelik (=ibn el-Hakim="son of the doctor" or "the sage") who was reputed to be a natural son of Solomon and Balkis (Arab) or Makeda (Ethiopian) Queen of Sheba. If this legend is rationalized it may be postulated that folk traditions of early Jewish associations were given literary form, in the early centuries of the Christian era, by Coptic monks familiar with Old Testament history.

[1] Luca di Sabelli, 'Storia d'Abissinia,' vol. 1.

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A 177 In terms of historical probability it should be emphasized that at many periods during the millennium before the Christian era Jewish influences waxed strong in the interior of Arabia and along the eastern coast of the Red Sea. There was regular intercourse between the two coasts of the Red Sea and the Aksumite kingdom on the borders of Eritrea, and the Ethiopian Highland emerged as a city-state similar in character to the city-states along the Arabian coast, and in culture more than half Semitic.

600 To the north of the Syrian area the tradition of descent from the House of Solomon grew up in the royal houses of Armenia and Georgia, after the conversion of those two countries to the Christian faith. At the same time there were very ancient colonies of Jews in Georgia and Dagistan which may well have dated back to the period of the Babylonian conquest of Israel. A later spread of Jewish influences and even of Jewish elements which may be checked historically from the works of Arab geographers took place in the ninth century A.D. among the Khazars—a Turki people who had founded a state in the northern Caucasus and along the Volga.

A 174 A similar spread of Jewish influences to the Ethiopian Highland in an earlier epoch is historically no more improbable and, in terms of geography, would have been a much easier process. The fact that the present-day Falashas are Agau-speaking indicates that the Jewish infiltration, if it took place, was at a period when Agau was generally spoken on the Ethiopian Highland.

A 563 T 105 *The Gallas.*—The origin of the Gallas is another of the curious mysteries of African history and the Gallas themselves remain the most significant problem of the inner politics of Ethiopia. They first appeared in Ethiopia towards the end of the sixteenth century. The country had been depopulated by the long Somali wars and by the following conflict between Catholic and Coptic Orthodox arising out of the Portuguese intervention.

During the next two centuries the Gallas swarmed over all the countryside of Ethiopia. They settled in the region of the southern lakes, which at an earlier date had been colonized by the Ethiopian Kings. They reached the Escarpment overlooking the Awash valley and the neighbourhood of Harar on the borders of the Somali country. Like the Amhara they seemed to prefer the Highland and they spread over Shoa up to the canyon of the Blue Nile and north along the ridge of the Eastern Escarpment into Amhara.

In Shoa, the Imperial province of Ethiopia, people speaking Galla represent about half the population; and over Ethiopia as a whole they probably outnumber all the other racial groups.

In the eighteenth century Galla troops proved the decisive factor in the dynastic wars which covered the period of the final disintegration of the mediaeval Empire. Galla chieftains lorded it at the decadent court of Gondar; they made and unmade Emperors and married their daughters to them. But coming as invaders, the Gallas settled as peasants. In contrast with the indolent Amhara squireens, the Gallas are industrious farmers and labourers.

At the same time the Gallas had, and have, little political consciousness or racial coherence. When, in the course of the nineteenth century, Ethiopian

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5
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imperial power revived, Emperors like Theodore and, later, Menelik, re-established Amhara rule first over the central highland and later over all the Galla lands of the south. The most formidable resistance encountered by Menelik was from the Moslem Galla Sultan of Jimma. From time to time certain Galla districts resented the corrupt or vicious government of individual Amhara officials and revolted; but these revolts were the common phenomenon of a feudal state of society rather than the beginnings of a conscious Galla movement against an alien Amhara rule. In fact in the Galla countries of the south the rule of the Amhara central government has proved more stable than in the north where it had to meet the challenge of powerful Amhara lords. During the dangerous revolt of Ras Gugsa Wolye it was probably the Galla contingents which saved the throne for Haile Selassie. During the campaign of 1941 thousands of Galla guerrillas took the field against the Italians, while the northern leaders, the great Amhara aristocrats, were inclined to wait on the winner.

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Gallas are everywhere in Ethiopia and there are probably few Amhara nobles who have not a strong tinge of Galla blood in their veins. Most Amhara have some knowledge of Galla (although many will not own to it), and Galla is popularly supposed to be the "love language" of Ethiopia.

I had little opportunity for investigating the subject, but I do not believe that all Galla-speaking tribes are racially Galla. In the belt of savannah country between the Mussolini Pass and Dessie I met the two sons of a Wallo Galla headman who were a pair of the most beautiful human beings I have ever seen. Copper-skinned and lithe, clad in panther pelts and leaning on their spears, they seemed apparitions out of the Bronze Age. These boys were of pure Hamitic type, rather resembling some of the fine-featured Shluh of the Moroccan Atlas. Yet, in Harar, where I had to disband a battalion of Galla Patriots who had come in from the south, I found stocky square-headed men with heavy jowls, with a fair proportion of negroid types. Incidentally they were reported to show excellent form as soldiers. They were mostly Borana and other southern Gallas.

The variety of physical types among the Gallas adds to the mystery of their origin before the sixteenth century. Some tribes have the tradition of having arrived on the east coast of Africa from over the sea, and one theory postulates the coming of the Galla from Madagascar and attempts to correlate their migration with the intrusion of Malay elements into that island. At present the origin of the Gallas remains one of the most interesting problems of African history.

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Harar itself has, since mediaeval times, enjoyed the situation of a city-state. The emirate of Harar was brought within the Ethiopian Empire only by Ras Makonnen, the father of the present Emperor. It has since remained a favourite city of the Imperial family and a stronghold of their interest. On the edge of the Somali and the Galla country and commanding the way down over the lip of the Southern Escarpment into the Awash valley Harar is a meeting place for all the tribes of Ethiopia and the Arabian coast. The old walled city with its narrow crowded streets and occasional mosques and *turbés* has all the characteristics of an Arabian town, as contrasted with the open settlements of huts, gardens, and plantations which pass for towns in

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

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Phot. W. Thesiger

Awash river, Northern Aussa

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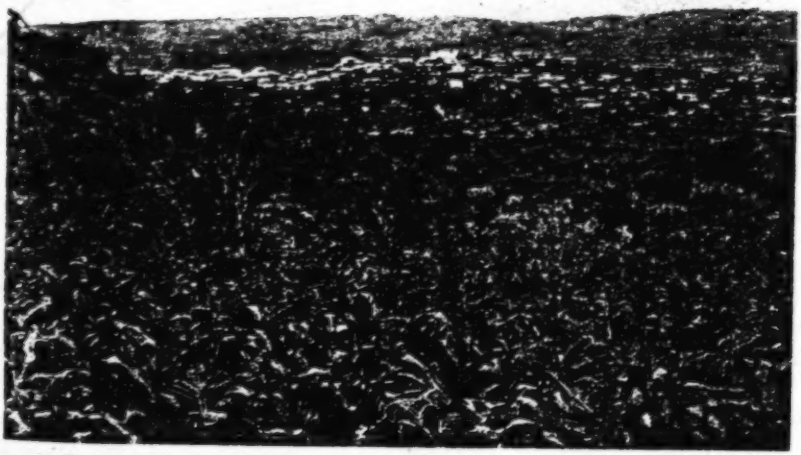

Phot. F. D. Corfield

[Facing p. 12] *Harar*

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

Ethiopia. There is a special Hararene language of which an Italian society has published texts. It appears to be a corrupt mixture of Amharic and Arabic in the Amharic script. The women of Harar, in whom Somali and Galla blood predominates, are noted for their beauty. In contrast with the uniform white cotton skirts and innumerable petticoats and draperies of the frizzed Amhara ladies, the Hararenes wear a variety of bright colours and, although Moslem, they go with their faces unveiled and shoulders and bosoms exposed. Hair is worn flat in stylized curls. Their skins are often of a beautiful rose-bronze hue.

Harar is situated about 6000 feet above sea-level and its climate is one of the most equable in the world. The fertile red soil provides an abundance of the fruits of the earth and the gardens which slope down round the old walls of the city offer a variety of colour. Many pleasant hours can be spent wandering among them and talking to the cheerful friendly people. Harar is famous for its delicious coffee; and the donkeys of the district of Mount Condudo, which rises to 9000 feet some 20 miles to the east of Harar, are reputed to be the finest in Ethiopia. The jackasses of Condudo are much sought after for the procreation of mules, and the whole life of the Ethiopian Highland still depends on the mule.

The Ethiopian Highland lies in close proximity to two of the oldest routes along which have passed the commerce and the changing cultures of men: the Red Sea and the Nile. Yet the Ethiopian Highland and its peoples have remained remote. The same conditions of history apply to the Riffian Atlas overlooking the Straits into the Mediterranean and to the great Caucasian massif which flanks the ways round the Black Sea and across the Caspian.

The presence of varied racial elements in mountain areas has generally been explained as the remnants of former peoples who have been driven up into the hills as fugitives. This may be in part true. Yet I am inclined to believe that the mountains have been rather the human reservoirs from which successive floods of men have poured down, like the spring waters, into the neighbouring lowlands. There are many historical examples of this process. In Moorish history successive dynasties were recruited from the mountain Berbers and it was the Berbers who provided the man-power for the Moslem conquest of Spain. The function of the Albanians in repopulating a devastated Greece was remarked by the historian Finlay; and they have for centuries contributed numerous and warlike elements to the populations of the Near East. The same role was played by Caucasian mountaineers in both the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, in Egypt, and in Persia. Mountain peoples generally breed in excess of the capacity of the terrain to support their offspring.

I submit, then, that the Ethiopian Highlands represented just such a reservoir of primitive human material—a reservoir which must have made an important contribution, in prehistoric times, to the peopling of the Nile basin. In fact the Ethiopian Highland and the Moroccan Atlas, with the intervening massifs which rise out of the Sahara, like Jebel Adrar, Tibesti, and Darfur, may well have been the primitive homeland of the Hamitic-

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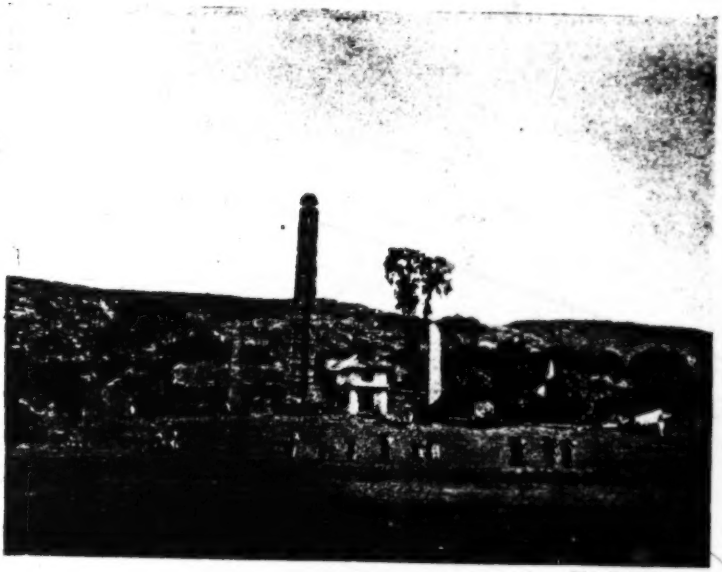

Phot. R. E. Cheesman

Aksum, monoliths

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Phot. R. E. Cheesman

Aksum, King's coronation throne and four pillars, Abunas' throne in background

(Facing p. 13)

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

speaking peoples, who have contributed such an important element to the populations of the Mediterranean basin.[2]

I believe that the early civilized world of the valleys: Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus, which has been revealed by the researches and explorations of the last century had its background in the great ranges from which its peoples came. Professor Toynbee has pointed out that the regions of the Nile and the Mesopotamian valleys must have been areas of unhealthy swamp and wilderness when men first settled there.[3] Such terrain would not produce the conditions necessary to stimulate the multiplication of an indigenous stock: A terrain of this type would rather need clearing and developing by immigrants forced to find their living there after having been driven down from mountain areas by the pressure of increased numbers on food, which we have seen is a common characteristic of mountain economy. But just as the Highland migrant working in the field of American industrialism soon acquires new techniques and develops a higher standard of material culture than his brother who remains a crofter in Scotland, so the colonists of the Nile and Mesopotamian valleys far outpaced in material culture the inhabitants of the remote highlands of Ethiopia or of the Zagros and the Taurus.

There is one last point: the eighteenth-century prejudice against mountains, which influence still remains, tended to an exaggeration of the difficulties of mountain travel in primitive times. Yet the higher ridges of mountain chains often are the easiest lines of movement for men on foot. It makes possible the avoidance of forested valleys and ravines blocked by undergrowth and full of fevers. In England even our earliest forebears kept to the Downlands and trudged along the ridges to keep clear of the thick undergrowth and swamps of the low ground. And the so-called Alpine peoples kept to the mountain belt as they penetrated westward into Europe from the Highlands of Asia Minor through the Balkans to the Alps and the Pyrenees.

In this connection it is possible to appreciate the essential importance of Aksum as an early cultural centre. Aksum is at the northern head of the route along the great Eastern Escarpment which leads into the heart of the Ethiopian Highland; at the same time Aksum is within easy reach of the Red Sea and the affluents which lead down to the Nile valley. There is a theory that the monoliths at Aksum are in fact the remains of a great Megalithic centre; the historic Aksumites merely made their own sculptural additions to the stone monuments which they already found in situ.[3] If we accept this theory we can see Aksum as a great centre of early megalithic culture having its connections with the reputed megalithic remains noted by recent Italian travellers in the region of the southern lakes.

[1] Abbé Morié, 'Histoire de l'Ethiopie,' vol. 1. Ethiopia was a term applied by ancient writers loosely and varyingly to all the northern half of Africa between the Atlantic and the Red Sea, and the term was even extended to Caucasian Colchis and to India. In fact mythical Ethiopia covered all that width of Africa and Asia where the Neolithic cultures first appeared. In classical times the name Ethiopia was applied to Nubia and the Sudan and it was only in post-Christian times that it was limited to the Highland area of modern Ethiopia.

[2] A. Toynbee, 'The study of history,' vols. 1/2.

[3] Sir E. H. W. Budge, chapter on Aksum in vol. II 'History of Ethiopia.'

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

travellers in the region of the southern lakes.[1] Other and earlier cultures may well have percolated into the Highland by the same routes along the ridges which are established for the mediaeval Copto-Ethiopian culture.

I am afraid I have put before the Society some rather hazardous lines of inquiry, with implications which necessarily impose a great deal of comparative study before they can be established or disproved. My excuse in these days when no one has the leisure to pursue exacting studies is that it is worth putting on record lines of inquiry which some of us may be able to turn to at a later date.

All photographs, unless acknowledged, were taken by the late Captain Mark Pilkington.

DISCUSSION

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (the Rt. Hon. Sir GEORGE CLERK) said: Captain Allen has been well known to us in the past as an authority on Georgia and as the author of an excellent history of the Ukraine. Military duty took him to Ethiopia for the operations which restored the Emperor Haile Selassie to his throne and capital—operations in which others of our Fellows, particularly Colonel Orde Wingate, Major Hugh Boustead, and Mr. Wilfred Thesiger, took a prominent part. Some day when the war is over I hope that the story of the Abyssinian campaign will come out, because not only is it in many ways a fantastic story, but it makes a very fine chapter in our annals.

It has been a little difficult for Captain Allen to prepare his paper for this evening, first of all because nearly all his photographs were left behind in Africa, and secondly, because his military duties have given him very little time to get his paper into shape. We look forward to hearing the impressions which the country and people of the Ethiopian Highlands have made upon him in the course of his military duties.

Captain Allen then read the paper printed above

The PRESIDENT: The lecture this evening has stirred memories of forty years ago. The lecturer talked about those miles of red-hot pokers. I have always held that if you give Nature a chance she is the best gardener in the world. I came once over a plateau in Abyssinia, a bit of waste country where no white man had ever been before, and there I found a great sheet of red-hot pokers and rosemary: the masses of orange-scarlet flowers backed by the grey-mauve of the rosemary were wonderfully beautiful. It finished in a sort of marsh in which there were immense stretches of white and scarlet arum lilies, inconceivably spectacular.

The lecturer has described the good manners and charm of the Shoan Abyssinians, but it is true that they are very quick to take offence as well as to show affection; they are very volatile. What he said about the Tigraians was also true; they are the tough northerners, more dependable, but not so easy to get on with. I will give you an instance of the funny though rather charming ways of the Abyssinians. Forty years ago I was on a certain expedition with a so-called Abyssinian army: two thousand scallywags, with two thousand small boys to carry their rifles, and two thousand unfortunate second wives to carry their food. We descended the escarpment to the west, and came into populated country. The Abyssinian soldiers were living on the country, and here they started to be extremely tiresome. I had to chase them off the inhabitants and

[1] See 'Africa Orientale,' Italiana Guida, published by Touring Club Italiana, 1939.

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

their cattle, and I was not popular with them. I had forty or fifty of my own servants, and I always made one of these come along with me with a spare mule and a rifle in case I saw something to shoot on my daily expeditions. It was not until the expedition was over and I was back again in Addis Ababa that it came out quite casually that every night over a camp fire the "victim"—that is to say, the particular servant who was to go with me next day—was compelled solemnly to make his will and divide his miserable property, with the rest of the servants as witnesses, because they were convinced that it was only a question of time before I was slaughtered by the Abyssinian army, together with the servant who would be with me. These people had no particular cause to love me, but they never complained and never refused to go.

I remember the Emperor Haile Selassie when he was a small boy in the entourage of Menelik. He and his cousin Lej Iyasu, the emperor whom in due course he deposed, were there with other small boys, and they used to wear those black satin cloaks, such as you have seen in the Emperor's portraits, with little gold or brass buttons, a very fine white scarf showing, and beautifully white cotton trousers. In their efforts to please the Emperor Menelik the Europeans used to send all sorts of consignments of our goods. One consignment which came along was a whole case of gibus or opera hats. Some enterprising man had made these of a kind of patent leather. The ordinary opera hats of silk were rather dull in appearance, but the new patent leather hats did not catch the fashion in Paris or London, and so they were shipped to Abyssinia. I gave them to Menelik, whereupon he made all these small boys in the court wear these shiny opera hats. In the result, although many would think they looked ridiculous, they appeared to me extraordinarily like the small boys of my own school so far as headgear was concerned, and I thought they suited them perfectly well.

The Abyssinians were beautifully mannered, they were very receptive, and, as exemplified by their present Emperor, many of them have all the best instincts of civilization in them. Helped as they have been by the very remarkable individuals whom Captain Allen has mentioned: Boustead, Pilkington, Thesiger, Sandford, and others, they have done great things for their country, and will do yet more; and that is one of the good results that has come out of this war.

In your name I wish to thank our lecturer of this evening for his very delightful lecture.